Violence via Social Media and AI and Digital Duty of Care

Editor's note: The following email (reprinted in full - almost - from The Anger Machine: The November Leigh Report, 3rd Nov 2026 - https://mailchi.mp/australianlabor.com.au/the-leigh-report-8135297 [LID 30046] - is by Australia's one politician, Dr Andrew Leigh, (federal Labor Member for Fenner), who has actually studied the impacts of lead. Before he was a politician, 24 years ago (in October 2002), Andrew contacted The LEAD Group for information on lead from petrol and its role in the increase in violent crime, for his PhD in Public Policy, at Harvard University, Boston MA USA. Leaded petrol features in his 2014 book "The Economics of Just About Everything".



Email Subject: **The Anger Machine: The November Leigh Report**

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the November *Leigh Report*: your quick monthly political roundup, direct from the bush capital.

Anger, Algorithms and Democracy

The attack on Helen Haines has drawn attention to the alarming rise in political anger. In the United States, an analysis of congressional speeches found that anger was at its highest level in 150 years. In Germany, offences targeting politicians and political candidates rose 40 percent last year. Britain has seen two members of parliament murdered in a decade. And in Australia, threats against parliamentarians reported to the Australian Federal Police have quadrupled since 2020.

There's no shortage of theories about why anger has risen, from inflation and inequality to housing and employment. But those things differ substantially across countries. If we're trying to explain a big global shift, the right answer likely involves a big global change.

Delivering the Joan Kirner Social Justice Lecture in Melbourne (text, podcast), I argued that the most likely explanation is the shift in how we get our information. Social media is now the top source of news, displacing traditional sources such as newspapers, television and radio.



Helen and I founded the Parliamentary Friends of Cycling back in 2020, alongside Dave Sharma and Stephen Hodge

Unlike traditional media, social media privileges anger. Stories that provoke outrage or denounce opponents are more likely to be shared than those that are more even-handed. This has been exacerbated by the way our feeds have changed. A decade ago, social media served you up the best of your friends' content. Now, most of what we see on social media is content from strangers, including from anger merchants who make money by producing posts that are as shocking and divisive as possible. On Instagram, for example, only 7 percent of content comes from friends, with the rest being selected by the algorithm for maximum engagement.

As I discussed in my Joan Kirner Oration, this doesn't just affect how we talk about politics; it's also shaping gender relations, with one survey finding that 23 percent of Gen Z men in Australia believe that feminism should be resisted with violence if necessary. Men in their twenties now have similar gender attitudes to men in their seventies.



Delivering the Joan Kirner Oration on the rise of anger and the role of social media

What's the solution? In the case of Helen Haines, we don't yet know everything about the motivations of her alleged attacker. My parliamentary tribute to Helen focused on her kindness, and her willingness to disagree without being disagreeable.

As to the broader challenge, our government's proposed Digital Duty of Care will help by requiring platforms to give people a choice between a friends-based feed and a stranger-based feed. If you want content by people you follow, you'll be able to choose it, without being defaulted back to a feed dominated by whatever the algorithm throws up.

There's also a vital role for community groups. As Assistant Minister for Charities, I've been working to encourage more people to volunteer, donate and join. Team sports, local cleanups, book clubs and parental support groups are all important to shaping a stronger society and a healthy democracy.





Cassandra Fernando MP and I joined some of the big-hearted charities of Melbourne's outer south-east.

Making the Economy Work Better

On the economic front, our government is working hard to address the global inflation challenge. Since the war in Iran began, inflation has risen in almost all advanced economies, in some cases by more than the rise in Australia. The private sector accounts for four-fifths of demand, but the federal government is doing its part by finding responsible savings measures (including one that is currently being blocked by the Coalition and Greens).

Beyond the immediate challenge of inflation, we're pursuing reforms to make Australia's economy more productive and dynamic. That includes banning non-compete clauses to allow more workers to move to a better job, proposed bankruptcy reforms to give Australians a fairer chance to start again, and encouraging a healthy and dynamic franchising sector (for more, see my speech to the National Franchising Council).

To boost productivity in the housing sector, we're encouraging modular construction, which I discussed in a speech to the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council. To reduce the cost of imported machinery and consumer goods, we're working to bring the European Union free trade agreement into force, a deal that will eventually see 98 percent of Australian goods exports enter the EU tariff-free.



Photo: With volunteers at the Red Cross-Uber clothing drive

AI, Inequality and Humanity

I've recently given two talks on artificial intelligence that might interest you. In a speech on how AI might affect inequality, I broke down the evidence to see what we know so far. My best prediction at this point is that AI may reduce wage gaps, but widen wealth gaps. In the workplace, these tools appear to be particularly valuable for increasing the productivity of workers with less experience and education, which could reduce wage inequality. But at the same time, many of the gains from AI may flow to those who own the technology, which could widen the wealth gap. It's still early days, but we know from earlier technologies that the benefits to society as a whole are likely to be larger if we can ensure that fairness is at the heart of the AI rollout.

Shifting from economics to ethics, I joined Franciscan philosopher Father Paolo Benanti for an event at the National Press Club last month on the ethics of artificial intelligence, moderated by Corrie McLeod. My speech (whimsically titled 'What Should AI Love?') is available to read or listen to as a podcast, while a transcript from the whole event is also available.



Launching Madhumita Iyengar's Multicultural Empowerment and Linkages Alliance

From the Frontiers of Science to Yerrabi Pond

On the local front, I've paid tribute to innovator Monika Mironov, educator Tamsyn Terry and the generous souls at the Canberra Food Co-op. On the Good Life podcast, I've chatted with former special forces soldier Ben Pronk about stoicism, epicureanism, absurdism, running, painting, ….

Until next month. Yours sincerely,

Andrew Leigh, Assistant Minister for Productivity, Competition, Charities and Treasury

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

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